

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 121

SP 026 910

AUTHOR Patton, James M.
TITLE Alternative Approaches to the Certification of Teachers.
PUB DATE 27 Sep 85
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the Virginia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Roanoke, VA, September, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Needs; Higher Education; *Nontraditional Education; *Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Certification

ABSTRACT

The present educational reform movement has been focused upon quantitative and qualitative issues related to the way teachers and other instructional personnel are educated. Alternative models for educating teachers which differ from the traditional college or university teacher education program have again become attractive. This paper offers a philosophical/theoretical framework for the development of such programs among local school divisions, state departments of education and institutions of higher education. The issues of quality control and formative and summative evaluations of alternative teacher certification programs are explored. The approach described in this article calls attention to the importance analyzing the success of the products of those who complete these alternative programs. (Author/LR)

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ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE
CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS

ED265121

A Paper Presented at the
1985 Virginia Association of Colleges
for Teacher Education
Fall Conference, Roanoke, Virginia

Dr. James M. Patton, Director
Division of Teacher Education and Certification
Commonwealth of Virginia

September 27, 1985

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ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS

Good morning. I am appreciative of the opportunity to dialogue with you this morning around the notion of alternative approaches to certifying teachers. Dr. Bowen has asked that I spend about 15 minutes to share with you a personal perspective on the issue of alternative certification. Permit me first to share some of my personal thoughts on alternative certification routes.

To accomplish this, it is incumbent upon me to share my perspective on alternative teacher certification routes by placing these thoughts within the context of my general worldview towards change, education, and teacher education specifically.

Education can be viewed as a dynamic system in which change is inevitable. As such, flexibility, diversity and alternative perspectives should be welcomed features of these systems. It seems axiomatic that if individuals have diverse needs at various stages in their development, systems designed to respond to these needs must, by nature, be truly dynamic and flexible enough to "fit" these diverse needs. Stagnation and resistance to change are hallmarks of dying systems. We must, in my opinion, be prepared to train different people to become teachers and be keenly aware that as we do this we should be prepared to design differential programs to fit these quite different clients.

I would further like to particularly note that reforms in the way we train (educate) prospective teachers must be linked with concomitant changes in our public schools and must recognize the political, social and economic contexts of education. "It is critical," to quote from a recent publication by Dean Corrigan, "that new directions in teacher education be embedded in and consonant with equally innovative directions in school reform. Major reform in one dimension cannot occur without concurrent reform in the

other." Unless and until this connection is made, true, long-lasting and appropriate changes in teacher education will continue to elude us all.

A new social and political contract among schools of education, state departments of education and local school divisions is called for. This new contract would be manifested in the form of true collaboration, shared control of the teacher education enterprise and creative experimentation. Our collective culture should encourage thoughtful analysis and experimentation and evaluation in terms of training designs. This movement is consistent with the Eleventh Commandment as espoused by the authors of Excellence: Some Lessons from America's Best Run Companies,—"Thou shall not kill a new training idea." If one wishes to stop a new teacher training idea or an alternative to an existing one, the burden of proof should be on the one who wants to stop the change, not the one who proposes it.

As we engage in reform in teacher education, these reforms should not occur, in my opinion, until they are consistent with sound and mutually agreed upon goals, purposes and objectives of education. It is morally and educationally risky to design alternative training programs unless the design of these programs is related to and consistent with clear purposes, goals and objectives of education. I submit that attempts to recruit and keep more academically competent individuals in the teaching profession and accordingly provide differential (alternative) training programs are means to the end of enhancing learner achievement and not ends in themselves.

So how do we go about designing these alternative training programs? What are their essential design features? What are their goals? Who should train our alternative program clients? Where and when should this training best occur? I do not believe that any one of us has all the answers, but that all of us have pieces of the answers.

The headlines of the March 6, 1984 Chronicle of Higher Education read "rigor is

urged in the preparation of new teachers." The National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education also called for improvements in teacher working conditions and salaries. Any program, traditional or otherwise, designed to educate teachers for our classrooms should be rigorous and designed with utmost integrity. This rigor and integrity, as these qualities apply to alternative programs, should provide for 1) selective admissions standards, 2) curricular scholarship, to include a strong theoretical base, 3) stringent pedagogical training and 4) supervised internship which includes demonstration, practice, feedback and actual classroom application. It is possible, is it not, for alternative programs to differ from the more conventional ones in terms of structure, time and delivery? However, these alternative programs should be characterized by the same high level of rigor and integrity and sound knowledge base, the lack of which we have been decrying in the traditional teacher education programs. Individuals who complete alternative programs should eventually meet those essential and basic standards established for others who enter the profession. Once they enter the profession, the work culture must be of such a quality so as to sustain and afford them continued growth and development.

Alternative certification has been conceived of as a method of attracting more academically abled individuals into the teaching profession. It is but an empty gesture to attract these individuals, or any other individuals, to a profession, unless these individuals meet the most basic and rigorous licensing requirements of the profession and enter a profession characterized by improved intrinsic reward structures, a decent, social-economic base and respectful working conditions which support growth without the teacher leaving the profession. To accomplish this, much work is needed in developing a solid knowledge and research base related to the nature of alternative certification routes. The utility and value of designing activities and experiences for the preparation

of teachers in non-traditional settings must also be tested out.

Alternative programs can not and should not be developed in the absence of a sound knowledge base and research designed to test the efficacy of their designs. Clearly, we know that some ways of facilitating learning of teacher candidates are more effective than others. Recent data appear to indicate that well planned and executed existing, pre-service preparation programs can make contributions to effective teaching (Evertson, et.al., 1985). Further, the available research suggests that among students who become teachers, those enrolled in formal, pre-service preparation programs, are more likely to be effective than those who do not have such training (Evertson, et.al., 1985). Alternative certification models must be subjected to the same research scrutiny as traditional ones so that sound models designed to improve the whole of teacher education can be scientifically tested out.

Erekson and Barr (1985) recently pointed out that quality control of alternatively certified teachers is not a direct and exclusive responsibility of teacher education. Rather, quality control is the joint responsibility of the employing school division, state department of education, as well as teacher educators. The expansion of alternative certification programs requires that teacher educators increase their involvement with local school districts and the state department of education to assure that those individuals alternatively certified are the best individuals employed to teach.

The development and implementation of alternative certification programs, as you well know, is not without criticism. The present environment, however, appears to provide an opportune time for experimentation and evaluation. If properly developed, these programs could provide us with invaluable information for changing the whole of teacher education. Well developed alternative programs could provide us, in the true spirit of change and diversity, with another cost effective model to facilitate student

learning. We are the only ones stopping this from happening. It was Joe Kennedy who in 1956 as his son, John was contemplating running for the presidential office in 1960 asked him, "if he realized what he was letting himself in for with all the crises waiting him." And John said, 'Dad, for two thousand years every generation has thought that its problems were insurmountable. And yet these problems were solved, and solved by human beings. So, why shouldn't I try!.' So let us all try together to improve the whole of the training of teachers and consequently enhance student learning in the Commonwealth. Thank you!

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